

More fox than you can sheikh a golden scooter at

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

I'm not being funny, but a cutesy-wutesy fox and French humorist, TV presenter, singer and actor, Vincent Lagaf, dressed as a dodgy Arabian rug-flogger walk into a bar. One of them says to the other, "do you fancy auditioning for the lead role in a new action platform game currently under development by French studio Titus?".





They both give it a shot, put in stellar performances and are each offered the single part on the spot. Vincent makes his

debut pixelated appearance in France starring in 'Les Aventures de Moktar' in 1991, while Titus - on account of already being the Paris-based developer/publisher's mascot - goes on to headline his own rendition of the almost identical game, released elsewhere in Europe a year later. The 1992 revamp we know as 'Titus the Fox', for reasons that elude me.

Vincent was already on Titus Software's radar in 1991 having released the number one hit single novelty song La Zoubida, which astonishingly went platinum and hogged the pole position for a staggering eleven non-consecutive weeks thereafter.

Incessantly echoed lyrics warble out the plight of the eponymous North African girl who has been forbidden from dancing by her parents. 'Luckily' the Footloose oppressed damsel is saved from a life without toe-tapping by her friend, the golden scooter-pilfering delinquent, Moktar, however, this being illegal in France they end up in the slammer... nicking scooters that is, not dancing. We're not in Iran yet!

I've read the English translation of the lyrics, watched the video and can confirm they're absolutely hilarious - gut-busting comedy of the highest order. I can't fathom why Vincent hasn't got his own Saturday night stand up show all over the globe. It's a travesty!

Sorry, I can't keep a straight face any longer. No. 1 for eleven weeks? *Really?* What were you thinking Frenchies? I really, really, *really* don't get it.

Then the Mr Blobby song *was* the UK's Christmas no. 1 single in 1993 despite being voted the most irritating example of its kind in a 2002 HMV poll. I'll shut up now.

La Zoubida's zany romantic yarn was dumbed down (if that's at all possible!) for the game conversion. In France, the plot

simply amounted to "Moktar is an Arabian man who is lost in the big city. You must bring him back to the Arab world", hence the reason no girlfriend-related shenanigans ensue.



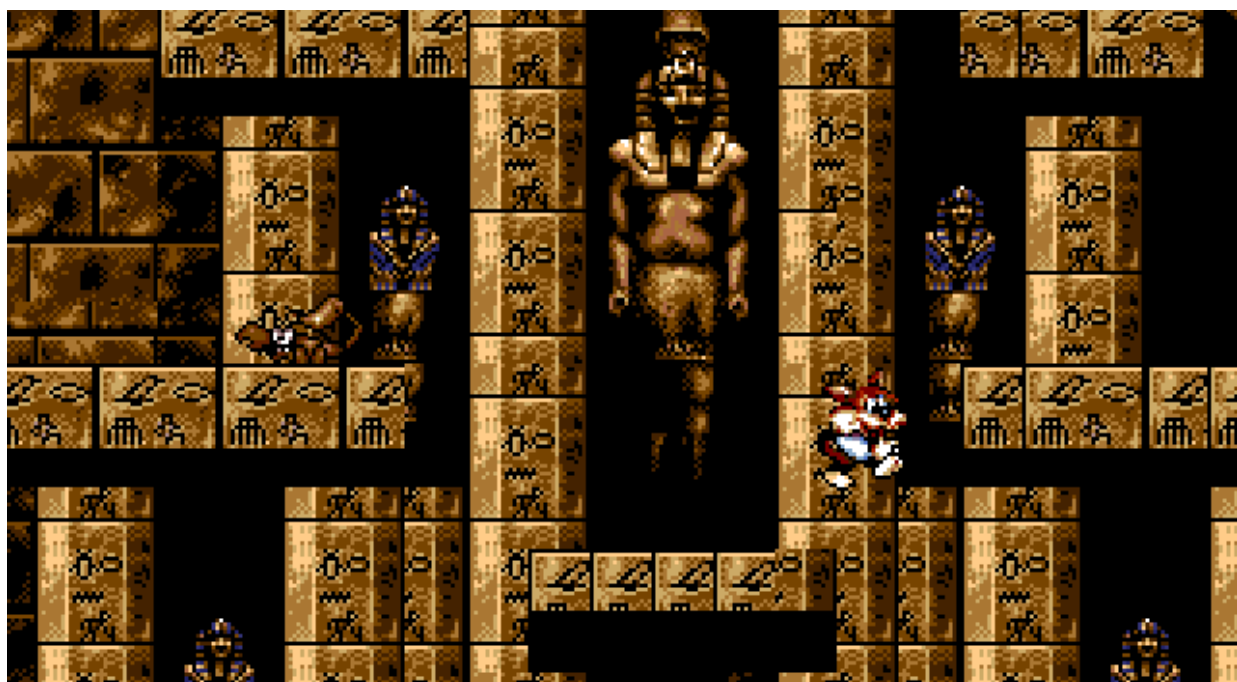
In the UK variant, the plot revolves around rescuing your reporter girlfriend, Foxy, from the clutches of the nefarious Sheikh Shah Hassan. She was out and about in the Sahara covering a story for 'Fox and Locks' at the time, hence the subtitle, 'To Marrakech and Back'. Well, would *you* want to stay there indefinitely?



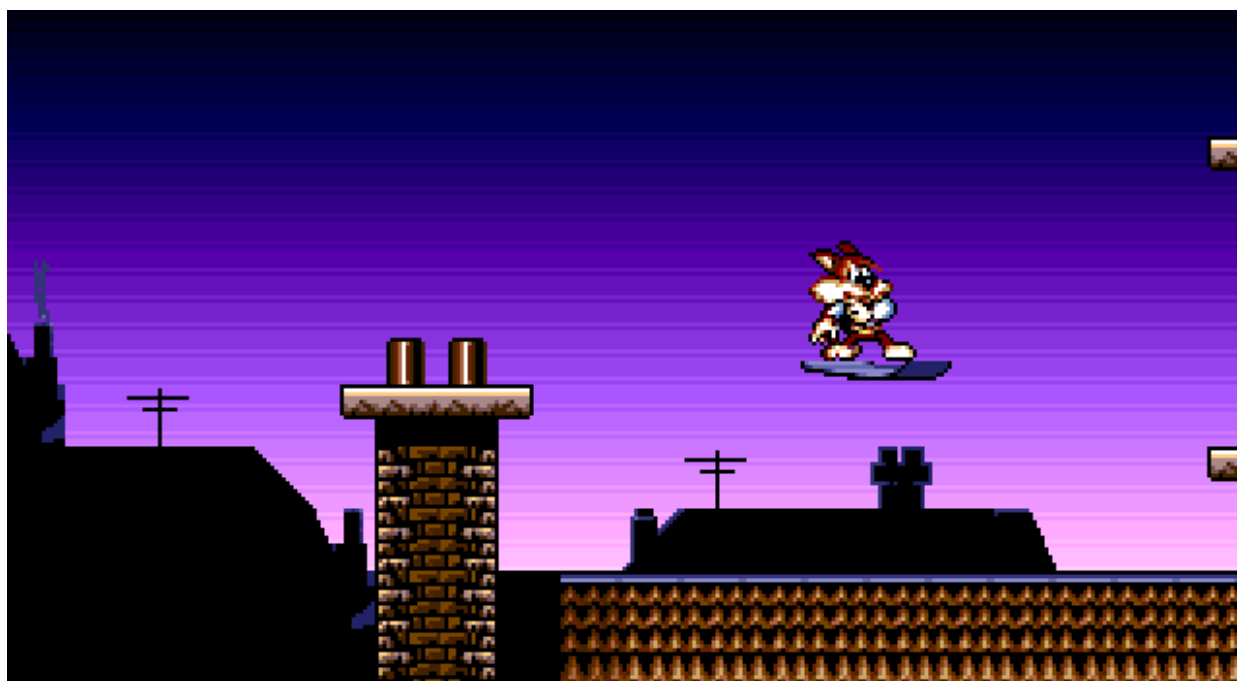
Recycling the general overtones, the Arabian soundtrack (minus the remixed version of La Zoubida) and settings remain intact. Why the sound effects are all so metallic is a complete mystery, however. Are we actually playing as RoboFox taking on a mech-tech army of cyborgs, only no one thought to mention it?

Unfoxknapping your betrothed beauty entails shimmying your way through 900 screens split across 15 environmentally diverse settings, avoiding or snuffing out 54 different types of adversaries.

Stage themes include Marrakech (obviously!), catacombs, cityscapes, subways, sewers, the Sahara desert, Egypt (strange way to get to Morocco from France!), a Bedouin campsite and a construction yard.



You'll mostly be doing this on paw, though occasionally the opportunity to hop aboard a skateboard, flying carpet, or scooter will present itself, fast-forwarding your pilgrimage no end.



If you've played Titus's earlier platformer, Blues Brothers, you'll know exactly what to expect in terms of aesthetics and control mechanics from this furry Arabian makeover.

Speed is the main thing people associate with our cunning canidae critter. Titus hurtles around so fast he's a blur much of the time, making the pixel-perfect jumps and broken permeable platforms almost impossible to get a handle on. Chasing Sonic's slice of the pie was clearly the order of the day, yet in effect, it turned out to be Titus's Achilles heel. It's what makes the game artificially too tough for its own good and frustrating to the Rick Dangerousth degree!

Fortunately, Titus recognised from the outset they'd made a game so irritating that an antidote to its worst habits would have to be built-in to salvage it. Pressing F10 immediately halves the ludicrous pace. With that, ta-da! The game is bearable.

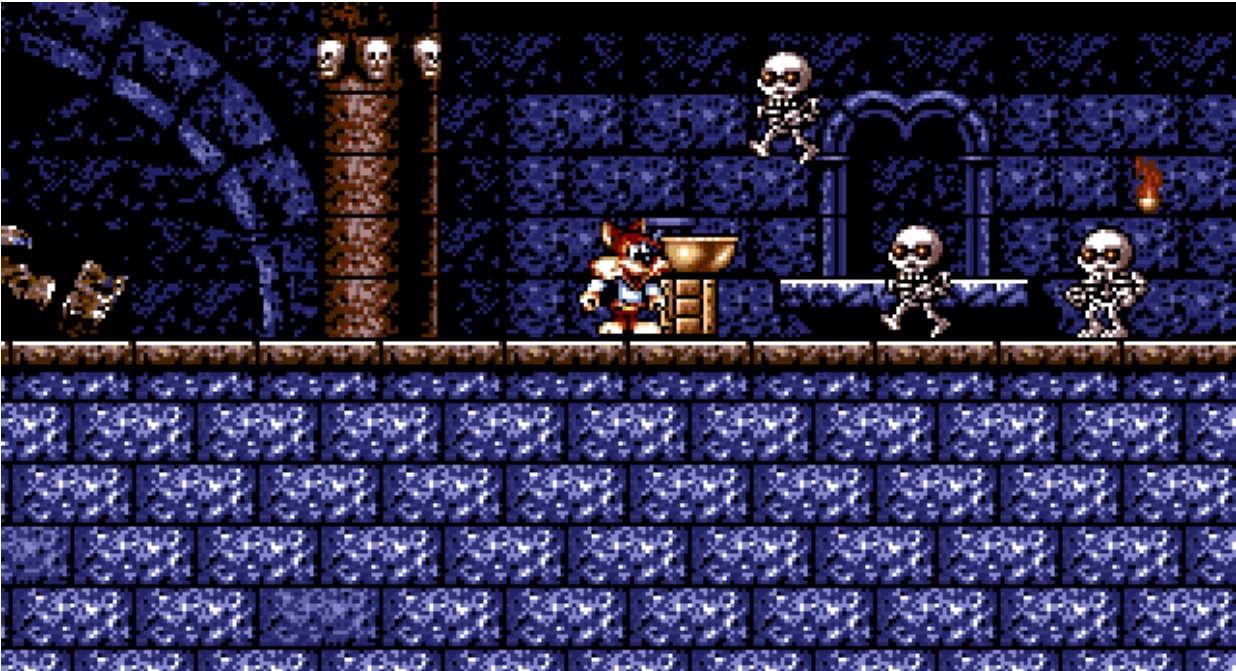
Bearable, though not so much enjoyable I should say. Removing the manic sting in the tail acceleration reveals quite a bland, barren landscape with sparse threats and little challenge beyond the over-engineered navigational obstacles. As such you'll spend the majority of your time scratching your head trying to work out how to get from a to b, first skirting around c, d, e, f and g before descending back down to the level exit... which is often merely a stone's throw away from the starting point 'as the crow flies'.

With the tearaway's hyper-speed caged, the Marioisms become more apparent. Though you can't head-bounce your way to victory, you *can* pick up a profusion of stray objects (including some baddies when crept up on from behind) and hurl them at your opponents to take them out of the equation.

Some double up as facilitators of the jumping or climbing variety such as springs, bouncing balls or blocks, while others are simply dead weights such as grain sacks and trash cans, whether they be one-hit wonders or recyclable. Bowling balls are in a league of their own in that they have the capacity to wipe out all enemies in their path in one fell swoop.



It can be a bit of a chore to find and fling projectiles, repeatedly backtracking to reuse them, so unless absolutely necessary you may like to live and let live, shambling around foes such as bees, bulldogs, cats, Go-Go Gadget Copter goons, tramps, skeletons, cutlass-tooled pirate peg-legs (which miraculously alternates between the left and right leg as they switch direction), TV-chucking grandpas, and bottle-slinging babies. Remember the objective is to reach the exit, not commit genocide or collect points.



Bugbear numero deux is the ridiculously long loading times you suffer just to get into the game itself. A countdown clock informs you how much thumb-twiddling you're expected to endure, which would be helpful if it didn't reach zero and *then* start loading in the music and sound effects *without* a time-ticker, which remain virtually the same on every level anyway. Chuck in a bit of dialup modem style screeching and you could easily be playing a Speccy game.

You get three lives to complete your mission, the health status indicator of which is divided into 16 bar segments. Take a hit and you lose 2 bars, while collecting a health bonus block boosts it by 1.

Titus's locale is very generous when it comes to dishing up energy top-ups, and the padlock restart points and genie lamp level codes ensure your hard-fought progress isn't wasted.

Good job too because it's a sprawlingly expansive world you inhabit, full of secret passages and bonus rooms accessed by

pulling down on the joystick for several seconds over a suspect looking platform, or by dropping an anvil or safe through the floor from a great height.

Titus isn't the most technically proficient game in the Amiga pantheon. Whenever there are lots of enemies on screen at once it suffers a nasty bout of lagitus, hampering an already subpar scrolling mechanic.

In the Amstrad version this is of the four-way push scrolling nature, the Atari ST is marred by a sort of semi-push scrolling system whereby the jerky update is triggered long before you reach the screen's edge, while the Amiga version scrolls when moving just off centre, introducing a slight delay before catching up with Titus. It's the best of the three without being what you'd call smooth.



This dodgy scrolling is nonetheless ameliorated somewhat by use of the 4 and 6 keys that allow you to force the screen to

pan up and down at will to scope out upcoming threats.

What's also nice to see is the 60+ colour palette - impressive for an ECS game, as are the well-drawn cartoony sprites and backdrops, that will make you believe a fox can globe-trot.

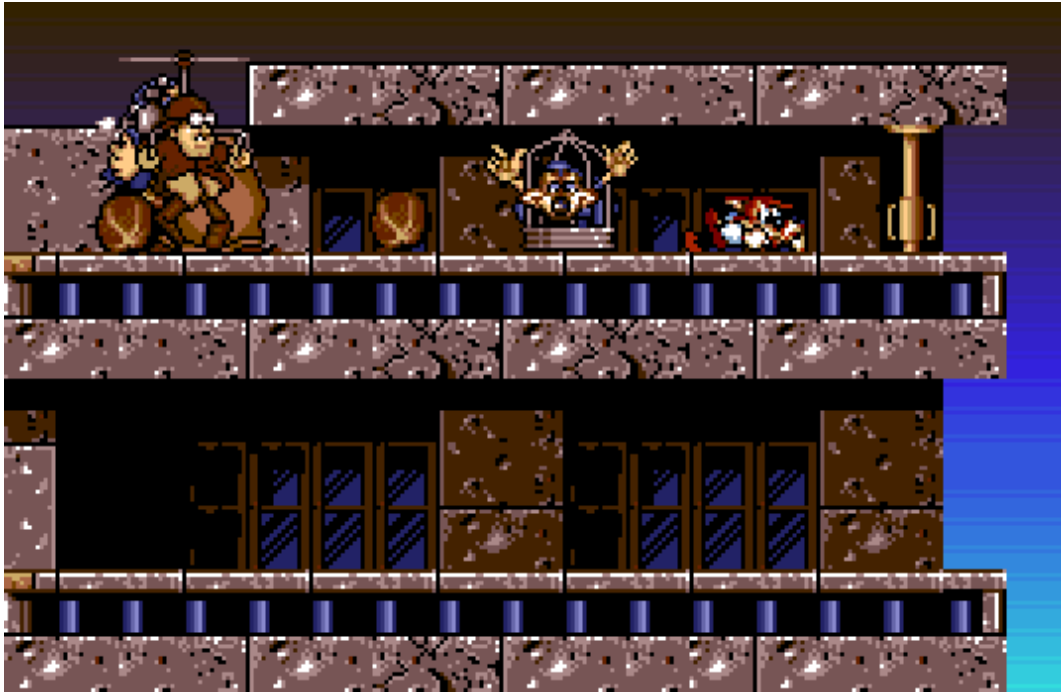
Just before each change of scenery you face a boss battle. This posse of death-dealers includes a stooped simian-like thug sporting a vest and shades, a battle axe-wielding semi-naked nut-job you have to wear down with a crate dropped from a height a la Chuck Rock, a gormless stomping mummy, and a big mamma washerwoman.



Ultimately, we confront an overgrown butt-bouncing baby boss. This takes place long before the end of the game, which begs the question, what happened to the sheikh who instigated this crazy caper? My guess is that as there was no sheikh in the original game, Titus forgot to create one for the rehashed version.

I assume the caged Wile E. Coyote (sans tall ears) look-a-like you discover on this desert level is your captive vixen friend.

Rather than break Foxy free there and then you carry her, incarceration unit and all, with you through to the end of the game. No can opener, Titus?



In the finale, we're joined in fox-holy matrimony to our beloved better half in the middle of a suburban street back in France, where presumably we live happily ever after... unless of course Titus were planning to make a sequel? Funny you should ask. Given that the full title of the original game was 'Lagaf' Les Aventures de Moktar - Vol 1: La Zoubida', it appears that a volume 2 was likely to follow, yet never did, possibly because Vincent pushed aside the music biz to focus his attention on TV presenting instead.

"The End"

Not my words, that's what it says. That's the entire wrap-up sequence, the fruit of your labour, so make the most of it.



Despite a few show-stopping drawbacks, Titus the Fox was extremely well received. French magazine Generation 4 awarded the home-grown Moktar flavoured edition 95% in December 1991. Our tweaked UK spin on the offering was assessed in April 1992. CU Amiga reached a 91% verdict, The One issued an 87% score, Amiga Power in a debate-style review arrived at an 88% bottom line, while Amiga Format opted for a slightly less flattering 81%. Overall our furball chum clocked up a respectable 85.7% grade across 10 reviews, elevating him to a standing similar to the likes of Fire and Ice, Putty and BC Kid released in the same year.

After inflicting upon the public a spate of poorly received games (including what is possibly the worst since the beginning of recorded history, Superman 64!), Titus finally declared bankruptcy in 2005, €33m in the red.

Their sad demise concluded a 20 year run producing and publishing games for every platform under the sun - in the process absorbing Palace Software and Virgin Interactive. Subsequently the rights to their back catalogue was

inherited by Interplay Entertainment who went onto release revamps of Prehistorik, Crazy Cars and Titus the Fox for modern platforms.

I do hope Christopher Reeve found it in his super-heart to forgive the foxy gamemongers before he departed this cruel world. Jor-El knows he had enough on his plate without that injustice to bear.